## **BRIDGING BUSINESS** AND EDUCATION: BUILDING INCLUSIVE PATHWAYS FOR ECONOMIC GROWTH

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# Bridging Business and Education: Building Inclusive Pathways for Economic Growth

New Jersey Pathways to Career Opportunities Summit

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Jennifer Thornton, Senior Vice President and Chief Program Officer, Business-Higher Education Forum

The Business-Higher **Education Forum is a** national network connecting pioneering corporate and higher education leaders to identify emerging skills and co-develop pathways that address talent gaps.



Our mission is to build the inclusive higher education paths that align to the workforce of future

We focus on three goals critical for economic mobility & competitiveness:



Increase the number of learners/ earners completing with high-value skills, credentials aligned to employer needs



Expand access and adoption of work-integrated learning models that inclusively connect and prepare talent



Scale and implement with regional networks and leaders

# BHEF works with partners to anticipate and build effective pathways across higher education and work











Business













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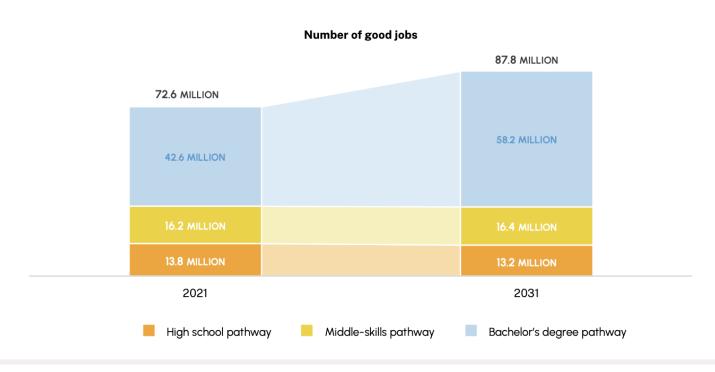




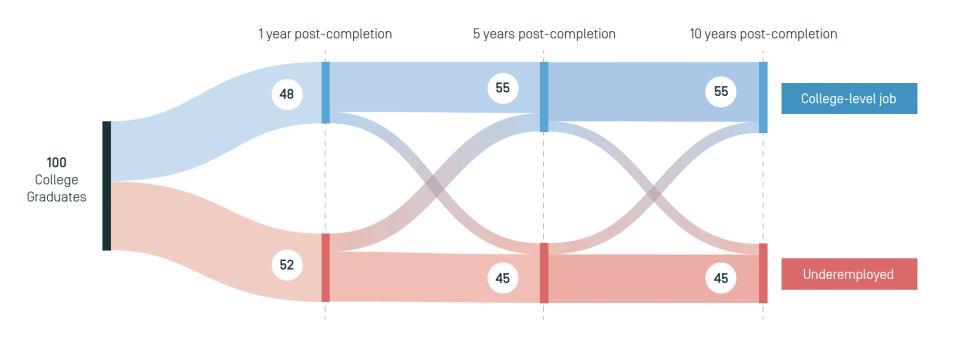
### **Competing dynamics**

13% ↓	Projected decline in high school graduates between 2025 and 2041
36%	Americans who say they have confidence in U.S. higher education.
26.7% ↓	Decrease in community college enrollment since it peak in 2010-2011
60%	Estimated percent of the workforce that will need to reskill in next 3 years.
<b>62</b> %	Business leaders who say they it is a challenge to find and equip talent with the skills needed for today's workplace
89%	Of businesses who say that partnership with higher education is a priority

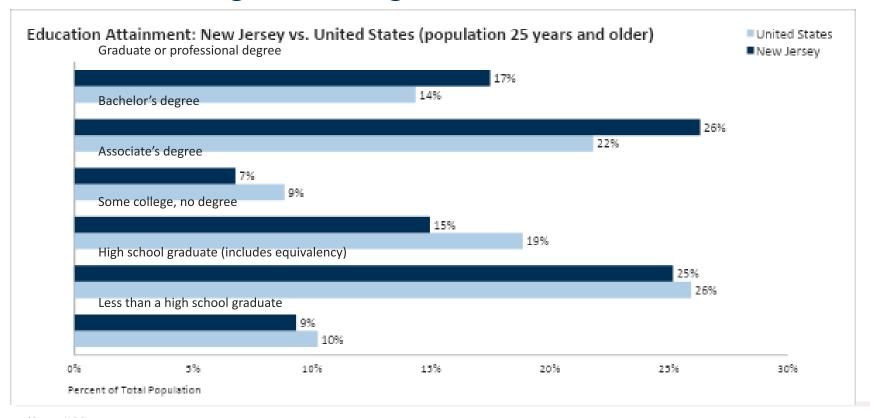
### Undergraduate credentials unlock "good jobs" of future



### Yet, as a sector, higher education has delivered mixed outcomes

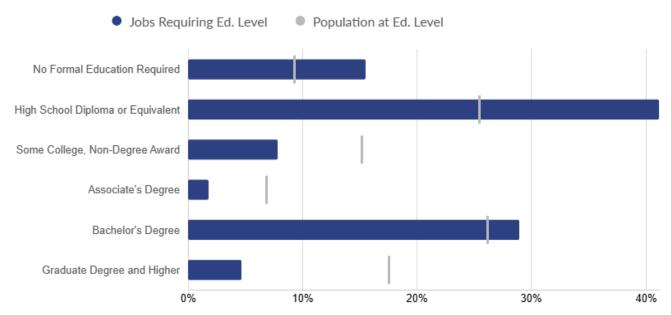


# Among adults 25+, New Jersey exceeds the national average in bachelor and graduate degree attainment



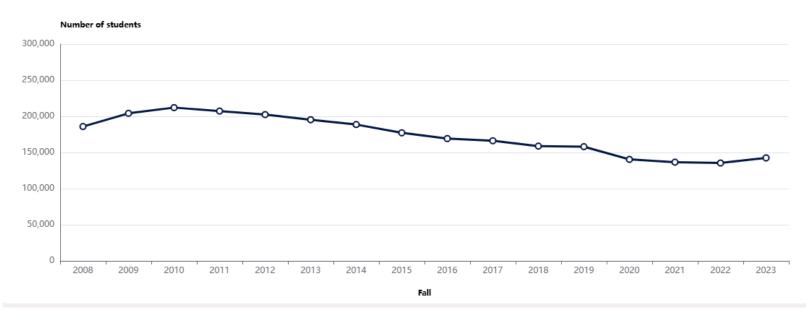
### **Educational underemployment is a challenge in New Jersey**

#### Underemployment



# NJ community college enrollment has been steadily declining since 2010

Number of Students Enrolled (Fall) in Public and Private 2-year or less Institutions in New Jersey



# Just 63% of teens say they plan to attend college (2 or 4 year) after high school

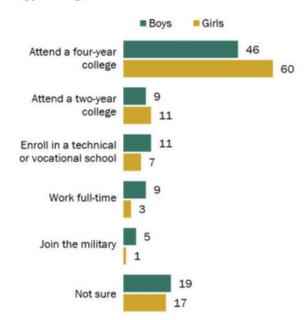
Girls are more likely than boys to say they plan to attend a four-year college, and boys are more likely to plan to attend a two-year college, technical or vocational school, work full-time, or join the military.

55% of White teens say they plan to attend a four-year college, 43% of Hispanic teens, and 50% of Black teens. **Black and Hispanic teens are more likely** than White teens to say they plan **to attend a two-year college.** 

63% of teens from \$75,000+ households say they plan to go to a four-year college, whereas only 23% of teens from households with incomes under \$30,000 say they plan to.

### Teen girls are more likely than boys to say they plan to attend a 4-year college

% of U.S teens ages 13 to 17 saying they plan to \_\_\_\_ after they finish high school



Note: Full question wording was "Which of the following comes closest to what you plan to do after you finish high school?" Share of respondents who selected "Other" (2%) is not shown.

Source: Survey of U.S. teens conducted Sept. 18-Oct. 10, 2024. "The Gender Gap in Teen Experiences"

# Young people are interested in and satisfied with non-degree pathways(e.g., apprenticeship, certificate, certification, license)

Student Perspective:

90%

Of young people in nondegree pathways report high satisfaction, citing **hands-on learning** and **faster completion as key benefits**.

Parent Perspective:

88%

Of parents expressed interest in learning more about nondegree pathways for their children. Parents with a bachelor's degree or higher and **Black and Hispanic parents** were more likely to say they were interested in learning more about nondegree pathways.

# Technology disruption is making upskilling and reskilling a priority

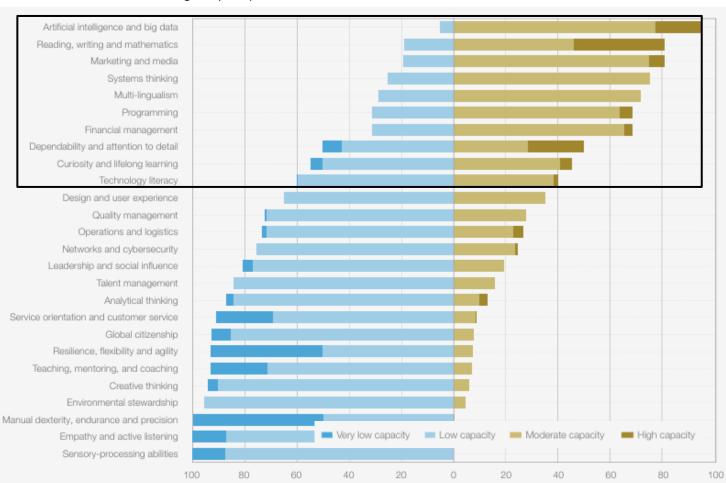
>12% of entry level roles automated By 2030, 70% of skills used in jobs will change

60% of workforce will need upskiling by 2030

#### **Current Capacity for Substitution by Generative AI, by Skill Group**

% of Skills with Moderate to High Capacity for GenAl Substitution, World Economic Forum

GenAl is poised to disrupt a variety of skillsets, from technology and data related to writing, marketing, and even certain durable/human skills.



# Durable skills are more critical than ever and support job mobility over the course of a career



#### **Human skills**

Adaptability\*

Communication

Conflict resolution

Collaboration

Leadership

**Problem solving** 

Teaming



#### **Business enablers**

Customer service
Data communication
Project management
Sales



## Data building blocks

Analytical thinking

Al literacy Computer coding Data analysis Research

#### **CASE STUDY**

Connecticut Online Al Academy

#### Goal:

Mobilize resources to meet the region's Al skilling and reskiling needs

### **Connecticut Online Al Academy**

#### Approach

- Grow with Google and Charter Oak State College partner to launch an Online AI Academy using Google's resources available to higher education.
- Charter Oak, a public online college serving the state, makes courses available for no charge to residents throughout the state.

#### **Outcomes to Date:**

- Courses have been made available to support learners in:
  - Essential AI Knowledge
  - Real-World Skills
  - An Industry-Recognized Badge
  - Flexibility
- First cohorts have been fully subscribed





#### **CASE STUDY**

## West Georgia Technical College

#### Goal

 Mobilize the regions workforce and educational system to meet the 100%+ surge in regional demand for manufacturing engineers, machine operators, and technician

# Regional Workforce Training Center to address skills gaps in advanced manufacturing







#### Approach:

- Established Regional Workforce Training Center (RWTC) with grant funding
- Created industry advisory boards to identify critical skills needs
- Launched subscription-based training model to standardize and scale courses
- Provided guick-response, customized training (as fast as 3 weeks)
- Built mobile training units for onsite employer training

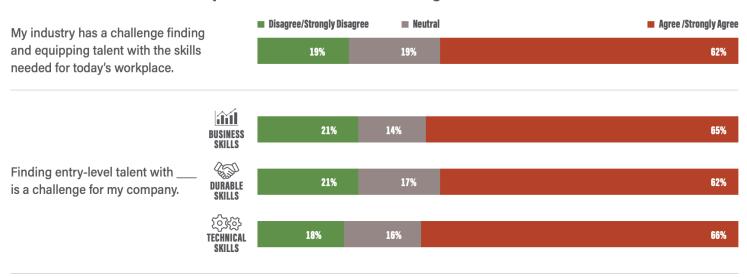
#### **Outcomes:**

- 1,100 training session conducted
- 1.600 learners benefited
- 32 employers successfully trained
- Delta Airlines cited 60% improvement in workforce capabilities from their partnership with WGTC
- Successfully addressed critical skills shortages in CNC machining, maintenance, and green technology

#### **◇**

### Partnerships are critical for preparing learners with future-ready skills

#### **Business Leaders' Perception of Talent and Skills Challenges**



Note: N=380 business leader responses. Fig. 1 shows the percent of business leader respondents who select statement. Survey Question: "Please rate your agreement with the following statements as it pertains to skill shortages: Finding entry-level talent with business skills is a challenge for my company; Finding entry-level talent with the technical skills needed for emerging occupations is a challenge for my company; My industry has a challenge finding and equipping talent with the skills needed for today's workplace."

Source: SSPRS 2024 responses.



### Partnerships are a priority, but not easy to do well



**87**%

of higher education leaders
agree that partnerships with
business are a priority



**89**%

of **business leaders** agree that partnerships with higher education are a priority



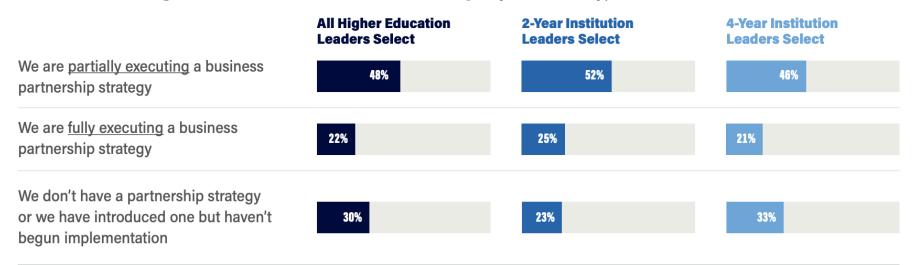
**22**%

of higher education leaders say they are fully executing a partnership strategy



### Community colleges are leading the way

#### **Status of Higher Education's Business Partnerships** by Institution Type



Note: N=226 higher education leader responses. Fig. 13 shows the percent of respondents who selected each option. Survey Question: "What is the status of your institution's business partnerships?"

Source: SSPRS 2024 responses.



### Partnership priorities vary for education and business leaders

**Business Leaders** Select Top Priorities for Higher Education Partnerships



45%

PROVIDING UPSKILLING/RESKILLING TRAINING TO EXISTING WORKFORCE



35%

STRENGTHEN RECRUITMENT AND HIRING PIPELINES



31%

**INCREASE ACCESS TO EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING** 



29%

EXPAND EMPLOYER ENGAGEMENT IN DEVELOPING AND TEACHING CURRICULA ALIGNED TO INDUSTRY NEEDS



27%

ENSURE STUDENTS HAVE THE RIGHT SKILLS AND CREDENTIALS TO ENTER THE WORKFORCE

**Higher Education Leaders** Select Top Priorities for Business Partnerships



56%

ENSURE STUDENTS HAVE THE RIGHT SKILLS AND CREDENTIALS TO ENTER THE WORKFORCE



53%

INCREASE ACCESS TO EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING



31%

PROVIDE BETTER INFORMATION ON CAREER PATHWAYS TO STUDENTS AND WORKERS



30%

STRENGTHEN RECRUITMENT AND HIRING PIPELINES



25%

EXPAND EMPLOYER ENGAGEMENT IN DEVELOPING AND TEACHING CURRICULA ALIGNED TO INDUSTRY NEEDS

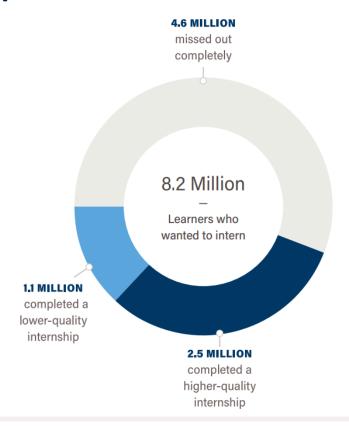
# Experiential learning is a key ingredient for skill development and employers seeking "ready" talent

**Impacts of Internship on Student Outcomes** 



Sources: BHEF Expanding Internship Report 2024

### Yet existing supply is insufficient and unevenly distributed



# CASE STUDY: WORKFORCE PARTNERSHIP INITIATVE (WPI) – TEXAS

This initiative focuses on aligning education and training with real-time labor market needs—especially in high-demand fields identified under House Bill 8.

Together, community colleges, private sector leaders, and key intermediaries are creating accelerated, skills-based pathways that position more Texans for career success.



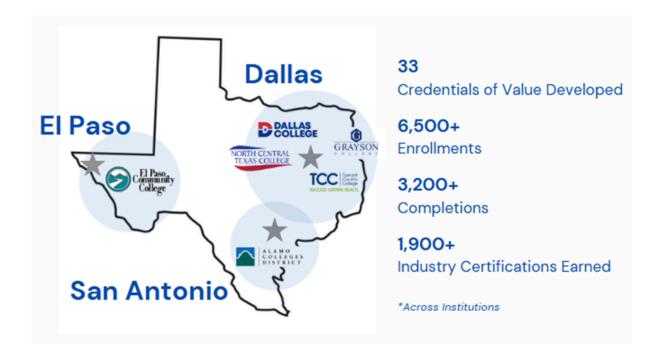






The Workforce Partnership Initiative (WPI) empowers employers to take the lead in shaping talent pipelines by collaborating with local higher education institutions.

WPI expanded to El Paso, Dallas, and San Antonio in 2022 and is currently growing its footprint.



# CASE STUDY: CREATING NEW PATHWAYS

EY redesigned hiring practices to enable increased hiring of associate degree graduates for key roles.

"We realized that many of the tasks required by our service delivery center could be performed by someone with an associate degree. The pilot became a strategy to meet our staffing needs and realize cost efficiencies. It was also an opportunity to give individuals meaningful work based on their skills and training."
- Ellen Glazerman, Executive Director, EY Foundation, and

Americas Director, EY University

Relations







San Antonio College

#### **Strategic Alignment for Impact**

Clear Goals & Outcomes: EY and Alamo Colleges set a shared objective—recruiting 230 students into entry-level roles within three years. This alignment provided a roadmap for success.

Addressing Workforce Challenges: EY needed a new talent pipeline due to a nationwide decline in accounting graduates. Partnering with Alamo Colleges unlocked a pool of skilled associate degree holders.

#### **Mutual Ownership & Defined Roles**

**Bridging Industry & Education:** With EY new to working with community colleges, Business-Higher Education Forum (BHEF) played a key role in translating goals and structuring the partnership.

Clear Responsibilities: Both partners adapted processes and expectations to ensure efficient collaboration and program execution.

#### **Delivering ROI for Both Partners**

**For EY:** The partnership filled staffing needs, created cost efficiencies, and diversified talent pipelines. The success of the model has influenced EY's approach to future workforce initiatives. **For Alamo Colleges:** The collaboration reinforced the value of an associate degree, established Alamo as a trusted industry partner, and provided a tested, scalable model for future partnerships.

# CASE STUDY: DEVELOPING WORKFORCE PATHWAYS

#### **Problem:**

- Severe deficits in cybersecurity talent
- Increasing need to protect business information and systems against cyber risks

#### **Solution:**

 Diverse talent ecosystem that meets regional need for in-demand, high-skilled, high-wage cyber jobs Cybersecurity pathways to meet regional workforce needs







- Ensured graduates have needed skills and pathways to work-based learning
- 10,000+ bachelor's degrees awarded in cybersecurity
- \$2.785M+ scholarships through UMBC's Cyber Scholars Program
- Served full-time and working adult students via online programs, certification programs, and bachelor's degree

#### **CASE STUDY:**

# BUILDING REGIONAL WORKFORCE INITIATIVES

#### **Problem:**

- Urgent need for tech talent for Connecticut businesses
- Challenges sourcing talent
- 50%+ of tech job postings require a bachelor's degree
- Local colleges and universities struggle to produce graduates
- Skills gap negatively impacting state economy

#### **Solution:**

 Create workforce accelerator to align higher education to business needs Tech Talent Accelerator: an accelerated approach across the workforce and higher education ecosystem to address urgent tech talent need.



#### In just two years:

- Engaged 79 partners across business, higher education, nonprofit, and government
- **Provided microgrants to faculty to create tech programs** or embed tech credentials into existing programs, mapped to industry partner needs
- **Developed and tailored tech microcredentials** in areas such as data analytics, cybersecurity, mobile application development, and game development
- Governor spoke at statewide summit to advance a tech-talent action plan and gain employer hiring commitments
- Colleges launched **15 programs** enrolling more than 450 learners
- Learners earned **117** industry-recognized credentials, completed 109 internships, secured 116 jobs, and received 9 promotions

# Community colleges are critical to national, regional and individual economic growth, particularly when delivering



In demand skills



**Experiential learning** 



**Network activation** 

In collaboration with business and the broader community



### The path forward requires us to...

Pursue Transparency and Build Trusting Relationships: Strong alliances thrive when partners operate with trust, openness, and a dedication to advancing each other's success. Establishing a sustainable, mutually beneficial business model is crucial.

**Engage Executive Leadership:** Involve CEOs and higher education leaders from the outset to drive urgency, align goals, and accelerate outcomes.

Communicate the Value Proposition Clearly: Define and share the specific benefits for each partner—especially employers. Identify the business challenges the partnership addresses, such as talent acquisition or retention, to ensure sustained engagement and alignment.

**Utilize Existing Resources, Initiatives, and Technologies**: Leverage current programs, funding streams, and partnerships to secure early wins and build momentum. Use data analytics, CRMs and other tools to align educational programs with industry needs.

**Support Sustainability and Scalability**: Establish a habit of recording key decisions, roles, workflows, and results to inform continuous improvement and support future replication or scaling.

**Use Intermediary Organizations**: Engage third-party organizations to strengthen partnerships, provide additional resources and expertise.



### Driving Impact through BHEF's Solutions Lab

**Insights & Thought Leadership**: Deliver market intelligence, actionable insights, toolkits, and public case studies.

**Higher Education Transformation**: Assessment, planning tool and experience to empower higher education institutions to be the partner of choice for business and align with workforce needs.

**New Talent and Credential Models**: Co-design innovative business and education solutions to develop, recruit, and connect talent to evolving workforce needs.

**Execution, TA and Impact Partnership**: Intermediary and technical assistance support for federal grants and capacity building via fostering communities of practice.

Catalyze Regional Partnerships: Design and champion regional convenings and empower leaders to develop and accelerate impact of collaborative models for economic growth.

Turn Your Challenge into An Opportunity



### Thank you!

For additional information, contact me at Jennifer.Thornton@bhef.com